

# **Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS)**

## **What is Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome?**

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is a recently recognized disease of the lungs. This rare disease is characterized by influenza-like symptoms followed by difficulty in breathing. The disease results from exposure to rodents.

## **Who gets Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome?**

Anyone can get HPS. The average age of known cases is 35 with an age range of 11 to 69 years. No ethnic group appears more at risk than another.

## **How does the disease spread?**

Hantavirus infection is usually spread by inhaling the virus, which is in the droppings, urine and saliva of infected rodents. Although uncommon, the virus can also be passed to humans through a rodent bite. The common deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*) appears to be responsible for the spread of the disease in most of the U.S. Other rodents may also be infected with this virus but in much smaller numbers. There is no evidence of person-to-person spread.

## **What are the symptoms?**

The illness usually starts with influenza-like symptoms, a fever greater than 101°F, muscle aches and chills. Other common symptoms are a cough, shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, and headache. Less common are dizziness or lightheadedness, joint pain, back, chest or abdominal pain, and sweats. Rare symptoms are a runny nose and sore throat.

## **How soon do symptoms appear?**

The incubation period is not well known in this disease. HPS should be considered in anyone with any of the above symptoms who has had exposure to rodents within the last 42 days.

## **What is the treatment for Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome?**

The only treatment so far is supportive. Persons with severe breathing problems are often placed on oxygen and a ventilator. The best course of action is for the affected person to be admitted to an intensive care unit equipped to deal with respiratory distress patients as soon as possible.

## **What can be done to prevent infection with the virus?**

Avoiding contact with any rodent species is the only prevention. Activities that should be avoided include farming around rodent infested areas, using rodent inhabited buildings, cleaning barns or outbuildings infested with rodents, and disturbing rodent nests and burrows while hiking or camping. When eliminating rodent infestation in homes or buildings, the following steps should be taken:

### **Keep mice and other rodents out of your house**

- Seal all openings into your home that are greater than 1/4 inch.
- Keep all weeds, woodpiles, and garbage at least 100 feet from your home.
- Keep all food, including pet food, in rodent proof containers.
- Keep kitchens and food preparation areas clean.

### **Trap all mice within your home**

- Remember to wear gloves while handling mice.
- Use snap traps to trap and kill mice.
- Spray mice and trap with disinfectant.
- Place rodent in a double plastic bag for disposal.
- Leave several baited spring loaded traps inside the house at all times.

### **Clean up after mice**

- Wear rubber gloves while cleaning.
- Air out area for 30 minutes.
- Do not create dust by sweeping or vacuuming.
- Spray rodent droppings and nests with disinfectant.
- Place rodent droppings, nests, and other contaminated items in double bag for disposal.
- Wash gloved hands in a general household disinfectant and then in soap and water.
- Wash bare hands after removing gloves.

### **Where can I get more information?**

- Your personal doctor
- Your local health department, listed in your telephone directory
- Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology 801-538-6191
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](http://www.cdc.gov)

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